

Improving public confidence in the police: a review of the evidence

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Key implications

- A rapid assessment of the available literature on public confidence in the police as well as an assessment of local practice schemes with the potential for wider implementation was undertaken. Interventions were classified (according to the quality of evidence in support of them) into three main categories: what works; what looks promising; and potential pitfalls.
- Overall the evidence suggests that the strategies most likely to be effective in improving confidence are initiatives aimed at increasing community engagement. Three out of the four interventions classified in the 'what works' evidence all included an element of communicating and engaging with the community (embedding neighbourhood policing; high quality community engagement; and using local-level communications/newsletters).
- There is strong evidence to support the continuation and embedding of neighbourhood policing, though the quality of implementation is critical as all three components of neighbourhood policing (targeted foot patrol; community engagement; and effective problem-solving) need to be fully delivered to achieve intended impacts.
- Restorative justice face-to-face meetings mediated by police officers also improved perceptions of the criminal justice system, including the police.
- Among the interventions that looked promising for increasing confidence, targeting confidence-building activities to localised areas where they are most needed was of particular interest. If further evaluation shows this intervention to be successful, then it could prove an intelligent approach to efficiently achieving increases in confidence with limited resources.
- One considerable potential pitfall to increasing confidence is the organisational culture change required. If some police officers do not believe that the community-policing approach is feasible or desirable then this can hinder the quality of delivery.
- To deliver any confidence-building intervention successfully, a high quality of implementation is required. Without high quality implementation there is a risk that a reduction in confidence could occur.
- It should not be assumed that the same interventions will work in every area and in every situation. The best practice for any community is one that fits their needs and conditions and is compatible with available resources.
- Local monitoring and evaluation of confidence-related interventions should be undertaken to measure whether they are achieving their intended impact and revisions made as necessary.
- Increasing and maintaining public confidence in the police should be seen as a long-term continuous process with time taken to understand and address the expectations of different communities.

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Keywords

Confidence in the police
Policing
Community policing
Restorative justice

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